

came into daily contact. Many of them had just such grievances against society as the men over whom they had influence. * The world was not their friend, nor the world's law/ The levelling principles, encouraged by some of the leading ideas of Christianity, appealed to many of them with terrible directness and with consequences still more terrible.

Certainly the wealth of the Church was very badly distributed. If everywhere the rector, instead of being an abbot, a prelate, or an absentee represented by a vicar, had been the resident parish priest, then the tithe, the salary from his patron, the dues and land belonging to his church, would in most cases have been amply sufficient to support him in very good circumstances. As it was, these endowments were used to swell the revenues of monasteries, chapters, bishops, and foreign churchmen, † who had many thousand marks more than enow.¹ If the Church of England complains that at the time of the Reformation her livings were reduced in value, that her poor parsons were robbed by a greedy nobility and an unscrupulous Court, it must be remembered that this was scarcely the aspect that then presented itself. The wealth of these livings, when they were great and valuable possessions, had been made the prizes of the most insatiable and the most useless members of society, while the vicars and curates were at least as ill-used, as ill-educated, and as ill-paid as they were after the Reformation. When the State in the sixteenth century robbed the rich possessioners and appropriators, there was nothing in past history to encourage the idea that the money would ever be applied by the Church to its proper purpose of supporting the more useful and humble servants of the community. If an institution grows corrupt, it must expect to suffer.

The laity were often unwilling to pay their Church dues to an absentee. The refusal of tithe and the intimidation of the courts where such cases were tried, had been a feature of the whole fourteenth century.¹ Wycliffe gave the movement a fresh impulse. Tithe and all payments demanded from the parishioner were, he said, alms that might be withheld.

¹ Gibson's *Codex*, ii. 718; Lyndwood, p. 42 of *Const. Prov.; Stats, of Eealm*, 1 B. II, 13, 14.